

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935

ON6 Buka ON6  
Kurtatchi

PLATE 2

491



b. THE GOVERNMENT ROAD

497



a. THE WAY TO THE SHORE

[Facing p.3]

## THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

3

the coast is broken by three large inlets, allowing of safe anchorage for schooners, with comparatively easy access to the shore, and so affording sites for coco-nut plantations, maintained for the production of copra, which, except for a little fishing for trochus shell, is the only possibility the country offers to white men. Between and behind these plantations are more native villages. The hinterland soon breaks into foot-hills, and behind these rises range after range of heavily forested mountains, a difficult region, much of which has not yet been explored. The interior is volcanic, culminating, as far as the northern half of the island is concerned, in the active volcano Balbi (9,500 ft.), an object of mysterious dread to the natives, who place there the home of their dead. [361]

The peninsula at the north-western end of the island, the scene of many of the activities described in the following pages, slopes gently down from the cliffs on its northern shore, to a flat sandy beach bordering the bay which forms its southern boundary, some five miles distant (Pt. 1 b). The interior of this peninsula is covered with what I take to be secondary forest; the whole of it has probably been cleared at one time or another by the natives for their taro gardens, the positions of which they must change frequently. [244]

A cleared track, known as 'the Government road', runs round the greater part of the coast of Buka, and, in places, when sufficiently dry, is possible for wheeled vehicles, enabling the planters to run a lorry for the collection of copra. There is a similar road along the north coast of Bougainville and down the east coast for some ninety miles, as far as Kieta, the place of residence of the District Officer and the only settlement other than isolated plantations on the island. This road is, in dry weather, also practicable for wheeled traffic for rather more than ten miles to the east of Buka Passage, but after that it encounters the Umu Mountains, which, though not high, are steep, and thenceforward a succession of rivers (innocent of bridges) and hilly patches make it improbable that the road will be available for any but pedestrians for a long time to come. It affords pleasant walking, and is much used by the natives in their numerous comings and goings, to visit relatives, to exchange commodities, or merely for fun. The people of each village are held responsible for keeping in traversable condition the stretch of road for a certain distance on either side of their village. They are supposed to work on it one day a week. The women do most of the work. [133] [651] [462]

- 512 slings of banana-fibre with a base of the heavy spathes of the  
 [482] areca-palm) and set off for the taro gardens, or they may tie round  
 [226] their waists the little baskets which they use to catch fish in the  
 rock-pools or to store the shell-fish they collect from the reef at  
 low tide. Almost every day a small party goes off on a bartering  
 [437] expedition, to meet the women from some other village with goods  
 for exchange. The more energetic of the men will be flourishing  
 bush-knives or fishing-rods; one may seize a spear and announce  
 his intention of going to hunt wild pig, to the huge delight of all  
 the dogs in the village, who signify their approval in the usual  
 canine fashion, and there is no peace in the village till he has dis-  
 appeared with them into the bush. A party may be told off to  
 work on the government road in order to keep it in sufficiently good  
 condition to avoid a scolding from the A.D.O. on his next visit.  
 • [491] Eventually, most people go off somewhere, either to work or to laze,  
 512 unless there is a house being built or a canoe being finished,  
 461 in which case some of the men will set to work on it, in rather  
 desultory fashion. The boys wearing the *upi* depart in a gang on  
 [883] some ploy of their own, the girls have either gone with their  
 mothers or are left to look after the younger children, and usually  
 one or two adults also remain in the village, having chosen not to  
 work to-day. They do not like prolonged concentration on any-  
 thing, and if I ask somebody, especially a young man, what he is  
 going to do to-day, I shall very likely get the answer: 'Nothing, I  
 worked yesterday.' There would seem really to be some justifica-  
 tion for the universal complaint of the older men that the young  
 men nowadays are lazy! The women do not bring back from the  
 taro garden enough provender for more than a day or two at a time,  
 [343] so they cannot take as many 'days off' as their menfolk do. The  
 very few really industrious families have probably built themselves  
 a shelter of banana leaves beside their taro patch, and will not  
 come near the village for days together. Those who remain in the  
 village spend a good part of the day in sleep. Women with small  
 [853] babies, or minding those old enough to be left by their mothers,  
 sit about on the back verandah or on prostrate logs, fondling the  
 infants. For a time, in the early afternoon, the village is quiet.  
 [482] In course of time the women come back with their baskets of  
 shell-fish or their loads of taro or firewood, carried on their backs  
 [312] as we carry a rucksack. The little girls go off to the water-pools in  
 the bush and return with the family's water-supply—for all pur-  
 poses—in a dozen or so cleaned-out coco-nut shells.